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ABSTRACT

A basic issue in second language (L2) teaching is whether the learner's first language (L1) should be used in the process. Differing views of language teaching authorities and various experiments carried out to test the use of translation in foreign language teaching are presented briefly. The author's experiment, involving teaching two groups of third-grade children patterns of Malay sentences by means of a Language Master Machine on which were pictures corresponding to sentences on a tape strip, is also described. The results seem to show that the group that learned the second language in a situation where the first language was excluded except for the instructions (the "Picture Group") actually showed the effects of a compound language system more markedly than the group that practiced through the medium of L1 (the "Translation Group"). The writer proposes to investigate further the use of L1 in L2 teaching and learning and the problem of acquiring and retaining meaning. Her experience with many children has shown that often they can repeat sentences and read quite well without any inkling of what they are saying. She feels that teachers may be inhibiting a "natural tendency" to translate, which may bring about a conflict between subconscious translation and overt injunction to think in the L2, with disastrous results to the acquisition of meaning. (AMM)

ED 047288

The Use of the First Language in Second Language Teaching and Learning[1]

Uses of the first language

One of the basic issues in second language (L2) teaching is whether one should use the first or native (L1) language in the process. The question becomes thorny if one takes the all-or-none attitude. The thing to do is to analyse the ways in which the L1 has been or can be used in L2 teaching and decide from experience or research findings where, when and how to use L1 to the best advantage.

The use of L1 in L2 teaching has commonly been referred to as translation and for the sake of convenience we shall from this point adopt the term, though it may refer to uses of the L1 in which no translation on the student's part is involved. Translation, of course, may be in two directions, i.e., from L1 to L2 and L2 to L1. As a test of active vocabulary and production of L2 structures the first kind of translation is more appropriate, while the second kind is more suitable for testing passive vocabulary and understanding of L2 structures.

It will be noticed that testing is included here, since one cannot know if anything has been learned until one has tested for knowledge of what has been taught. In objective testing of comprehension of a passage in L2, where the passive and productive aspects of achievement are to be assessed separately, the questions on the passage and the

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multiple choice answers are given in L1. Often the rubic of L2 tests is given in L1 to obviate misunderstanding of what is required.

Translation is used in the very process of teaching and learning as in the grammar-translation method. The student is first required to memorise vocabulary lists consisting of L2 words on one side and the L1 equivalents on the other. L1 is used in explaining the grammatical rules of L2. The student is then given practice exercises which consist of translating L1 sentences into L2 by a process of applying the grammatical rules to the memorised vocabulary. In this method L1 is used to give the meaning of L2 words and also as a stimulus for producing L2 sentences. Either of the above uses of L1 may be adopted without the other in a method of L2 teaching.

Another way of using L1 is to give the meaning of L2 sentences in pattern practice. What is involved here is not really the kind of translation one finds in the grammar-translation method. There are variations also in this particular use of L1. The teacher may supply the equivalent L1 sentence for every L2 sentence practised, keeping the L1 sentence in view while the L2 sentence is being repeated. Alternately, the L1 sentence may be given at the beginning of the repetition and at stated intervals; a check is made on the pupil's understanding of the L2 sentences by asking for the L1 equivalent. The pupil is not allowed to attempt a word-for-word translation. Where he hesitates, the L1 equivalent is quickly supplied by the teacher. Another way of using the L1 is drill exercises is to give the cue in L1 for substitution exercises. This keeps the meaning of practice sentences in mind and prevents the

drill from becoming mechanical and meaningless.

Differing views on the use of L1

Before World War II translation was an accepted technique in L2 teaching since the predominant method was the grammar-translation method referred to above. But even then there were differing points of view with regard to the use of translations. We get an indication of this, if we look at three well-known language teaching books published towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

Henry Sweet in The Practical Study of Foreign Languages [1] was generally in favour of translation. While discussing the cross-associations between languages, he conceded that learning to think in the foreign language was desirable but that it was not possible until one had a "thorough and ready knowledge of it ..... when we begin to learn a new language we cannot help thinking in our own language." (p.197). He stated that it was a fallacy to think that by getting rid of translation we could get rid of the cross-associations of our native language since these cross-associations were independent of translation. The associations which had been formed with the L1 were so strong that it was futile to prevent their occurence in L2 learning.

Jespersen in How to Teach a Foreign Language [2] was generally not in favour of translation. He caricatured language lessons in which

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1 First published in 1899.

2 First published in 1904.

students stumbled painfully in their attempts at translating L2 passages into L1, describing the mental processes of the students with biting humour. He maintained that this kind of translation encouraged perfunctory attention to the forms of L2, so that a student remembered the L1 translation but not the original. He realised that on occasion translation could give the required information more quickly and clearly than an explanation in L2, but even then he advised that it should be used very sparingly. He also considered the use of translation in testing and concluded again that it must be kept to a minimum.

Palmer did not consider translation itself to be a bad habit unless carried to extremes. In The Principles of Language Study [1] he inveighed against the extreme supporters of the direct method who identified it with "the non-translating principle and with the principle of the exclusion of the mother tongue ....." (p.83). Of the four methods of giving the meaning of lexical items he placed translation second to immediate association in degreee of concreteness and declared that it might sometimes be more concrete than immediate association, more "direct" than definition. Apparently there had been an attempt to reform the method of language teaching in his day and he pointed out that the reformers had misjudged "translation" to be the root of the evil .....the evil lay in the exaggerated attention which had been paid to grammatical construction." He called for a rehabilitation of "the comparatively innocent process of translation" and the "use of the mother tongue as a vehicular language,"

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1 First published in 1922.

which was a natural process of proceeding from the known to the unknown. During the Second World War there was a "revolution" in the methods of second language teaching. Linguists were called in to the aid of language teachers to produce proficient foreign language speakers in the shortest time possible. The result was to make the Direct Method or Audio-Lingual Method the officially accepted method of foreign language teaching and to discredit translation. This is reflected in Language Course books which present pattern drills instead of translation exercises. It is also reflected in books and journal articles on second language teaching.

The writers are either emphatic in the condemnation of translation or feel the necessity to be on the defensive when advocating translation. Gatenby (1948) described translation as a "deceptive process" which should be avoided at all costs as an exercise, oral or written. Shen (1950) speaking from the linguistic point of view showed that the differences between languages made translation an unsatisfactory technique. Cartledge (1953) censures teachers who try to teach foreign languages by translation: they are beginning at the wrong end because translation is the hardest of language exercises. "It is the end, not the means of their study of a foreign language." Brooks (1960) is categorical on the use of L1 and translation: "What the learner must <u>not</u> do may be summarised as follows: (a) he must not speak English, (b) he must not learn lists of English-foreign equivalents, and (c) he must not translate from the foreign language into English." (p.52). Halliday, et al., (1965) think that to adopt translation as a technique in the early stages of language teaching is to face the pupil with "an ungraded mixture of problems in grammar,

lexis and orthography" and later in the course translation becomes harder to set and mark as well as more difficult to perform. They conclude the section on translation by saying that it is more suitable for the advanced stages of a university special degree course.

Allen (1948) is one example of writers on the defensive about translation. He agrees with Jespersen in disapproving of the translation of prose passages, but pleads for the use of L1 as an aid in the drilling of certain structures. Ryan (1960) is another defensive writer who makes "a special plea for translation because I feel it has been neglected." The use of translation in the intermediate course, he said, would make students aware of the "more subtle differences in thought patterns between speakers of different languages." (p.264)

In more recent issues of English Language Teaching there is a trend in favour of translation in one form or another though not as in the old grammar-translation method. Also, the tone of these articles is less apologetic. Aarts (1968) speaks for the use of translation in L2 teaching at university level within the limits of certain clearly stated conditions. Translation, he says, is not an end in itself but encourages a student to approach the English text with a maximum of concentration. Pickett (1968) concluded his paper on translation as a testing technique with these words: "Let us not mention translation with a sneer, therefore, until we have properly explored its possibilities as a testing technique."

Research on the use of L1 in L2 teaching

The last mentioned writer above leads us to a consideration of

actual research on the problem of translation and the use of L1 in L2 teaching. Both are generally in disfavour as teaching techniques and the main objection to them is derived from association psychology. It has been claimed again and again that the use of L1 aggravates interlingual interference or intrusion of L1 into L2 structures. However, the claim has not been supported by experimental evidence.

Pickett, referred to above, conducted an experiment in which he compared translation and blank-filling as testing techniques. The classes concerned were given two tests a week apart. The content of the tests was the same and the criterion used was the average mark over a half-year's work. The translation test results proved nearer the average standard set. He pointed out that blank-filling tested a narrow range of items, was unrealistic, time-as well as paper-consuming and open to guessing. Also it could not test idioms and irregularities. Translation called forth many skills at a time and was nearer to real-life use of language. It might be objected that translation here was used merely as a testing technique. The answer is that what can be used for testing may also be used as part of a teaching technique.

Torrey (1965) investigated the effects of two methods of practice in foreign language learning. The subjects were undergraduates and the language was Russian. Her experiment compared the traditional method of presenting grammar by rule and example with the method of pattern drill. All the subjects were first taught to read Russian and the vocabulary needed for the practice. In both methods the printed material was presented by means of a simple machine which used paper-tape, so that the sense

modality was controlled. The pattern-drill method incorporated a kind of literal translation; the subjects were taught complete Russian sentences to correspond with English sentences. Each practice session was preceded by a short grammar lesson. At first the complete Russian sentence was presented in print with the word-for-word English translation. The Russian words were then gradually faded out and the initial word-for-word English translation finally reverted to normal English sentences, while the subjects continued to say the complete Russian sentences. The Control Group received a grammar lesson and then heard and saw a series of words that could be used in sentences of the type presented in the grammar lesson. However, this group was not given a chance to practise the sentences at all, as they would have had in the grammar-translation method.

In the final assessment of learning, the Drill Group which practised with the literal translation was clearly superior to the Control Group. However, since the Control Group did not get a fair chance to practise sentence making and since each session in the Drill group was preceded by a short grammar lesson that might have been interpreted as presenting rules or generalisations that were applied in practice, it was in effect a comparison of learning grammar with practice and no practice. One cannot conclude from the experiment that it was the use of translation which made a significant difference in the results.

The next experiment, McKinnon (1965), is included here because it led to another one which investigated the effects of translation. McKinnon's experiment will be described very briefly as it did not make use of translation in the experimental procedure but only in one of its criterion

tests. He used a Language Master to present Police Motu[1] sentences to grade-three children. Among other variables he investigated three methods of practice. Method One consisted of merely repeating the sentences recorded on blank Language Master cards. Method Two consisted of looking at the picture of the situation drawn on the card while listening to and repeating the sentence. Method Three consisted of looking at the picture and formulating the sentence before listening to the recorded sentence and repeating it. Method Two corresponded to prompting (providing a clue) and Method Three corresponded to confirmation (active response on the part of the learner).

Method Three was found to be superior regardless of the other variables. This seems to suggest that confirmation with "referential support" is the best method of practice. The results of the translation test showed no significant difference between the groups. McKinnon suggested that if the children had been able to move readily between English and Motu "there would have been a question of whether they were learning Motu or equating the learning with the solving of verbal puzzles." (p.142) He seems to imply that the ability to translate is a symptom of inadequate learning of a language. Such a statement called for investigation, which formed part of the next experiment to be described.

Lim (1968) was interested in verifying the findings of McKinnon's experiment and in investigating the use of L1 for referential support as one of the variables in L2 learning. The theory of compound and co-

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1 The Lingua Franca of New Guinea

ordinate bilingualism (Ervin and Osgood, 1954) says that when the L2 is learned through L1, a compound system in which there is one system of representation for both languages is developed. When the L2 is learned in isolation from the L1, then a co-ordinate system, in which there are two independent representations, is developed. The theory further states that interference from L1 is more likely in a compound than a co-ordinate system. The theory has had some support from the research done by Lambert (1961) and his colleagues. No experiment, however, has been conducted to compare practising L2 sentences with pictures versus practising L2 sentences with translation as "referential support," to find out if the latter method does produce more interference.

In the Lim experiment, grade-three children were taught 4 patterns of Malay sentences by means of a Language Master. She investigated four variables: the material, procedure and two methods (prompting versus confirmation and pictures versus translations). In this account, only one method variable, pictures versus translations, will be dealt with since we are interested in the effects of the use of L1.

For the purpose of comparing the two methods of practice the Picture Group practised Malay sentences with Language Master cards on which were pictures corresponding to the sentences recorded on the tape strip. The child looked at the picture while he said the corresponding sentence. The Translation Group practised with cards on which were written English sentences corresponding to the recorded Malay sentences on the tape strip of the card. Thus one group of children received meaning through pictures and the other group by means of translation. There were seventy-

two children in each group. The vocabulary required for the practice sentences was learned beforehand by associating the word with its pictorial representation.

The five criterion tests were devised in such a way as not to give either method of practice the advantage. All the sentences used in the criterion tests had not been heard by the children before, though they were based on the four patterns previously learned. The tests were as follows:

Tests of Receptive Skills

1. Picture Matching. A Malay sentence was recorded with four pictures drawn on the card. The child had to match the heard sentence with appropriate picture.
2. Sentence Matching. This test was similar to the first one except that instead of four pictures there were four English sentences on the card.
3. Pattern Recognition. In this test, the children were required to discriminate between well-formed and scrambled Malay sentences which were again recorded. After listening to each sentence the child gave his response.

Tests of Productive Skills

4. Picture Test. A picture depicting a simple activity or situation was shown to the child who was required to produce a Malay sentence corresponding to the picture.
5. Translation Test. This test was similar to the Picture Test except that the child was shown an English sentence instead of a picture as a stimulus for producing the Malay sentence.

The data were subjected to both a quantitative and qualitative analysis. The results of the quantitative analysis showed no significant difference between the two groups. The Picture Group was able to practise more times than the other group but since this made no difference in the criterion scores it was a questionable advantage.

In the qualitative analysis the errors from the Picture and Translation Tests were classified into those due to (a) vocabulary, (b) intralingual interference and (c) interlingual interferences. The only significant difference was between the error means for interlingual interference in the Translation Test. The Picture Group has a significantly higher number of errors attributable to interference from the native language. The results say in effect that the group that learned the second language in a situation where the first language was excluded (except for the instructions) actually showed the effects of a compound language system more markedly than the group that practised through the medium of L1.

It may be argued that this is just another example of the specificity of various language skills, i.e., children learn what they are taught. There is no doubt that the superiority of the Translation Group is the result of their method of practice, which corresponds to the criterion test situation in the Translation Test. However, when one applies the same argument to the respective group's performance on the Picture Test there is less evidence of its validity. The Picture Test gave the Picture Group the same kind of advantage that the Translation Test gave to the Translation Group, but although the Picture Group had a lower error

mean for interlingual interference, the difference was far from being significant. In short, other things being equal, a method of practice that makes use of translation to convey the meaning of a sentence seems to be more advantageous than practice with pictures as referential support. The former method does not result in a significantly higher amount of interlingual interference and at the same time facilitates translating from the first to the second language. Further analysis confirms the view that practising with pictures for meaning tends to produce a more practice-bound or specific skill than practising with translation.

Dodson (1967) conducted a series of experiments in foreign language learning in Aberystwyth. The aim was to find out how primary children, secondary children and adults "can best acquire and retain sentence-meaning whilst under-going an active language-learning process not connected with meaning acquisition." In his experiments the additional process was that of imitating spoken sentences, which usually takes place at the same time as the pupil is trying to work out the meaning of the sentence he has to imitate.

Dodson used three modes of presentation for the acquisition of meaning. In the first mode, L2 sentences were presented with pictures and the experimenter made use of actions, objects and qualities to clarify meaning. In the second mode, L2 sentences were presented with pictures, but the pupils were initially given the L1 equivalent of the sentences, after which no further help was given. In the third mode,

the L1 equivalent was given at the beginning of each sentence practice, but no pictures or other help.

The experiments were made with the group of primary children who had followed a year's language course and a group of secondary children who had no previous knowledge of the language. In both instances, the second mode of presentation, which incorporated the native language, gave the best results for the acquisition and retention of sentence meaning.

Another series of experiments were made to find out the best combination of stimuli for imitation exercises. Four combinations were tried with the primary group:-

(A) L2 spoken word, picture, L2 printed word.

(B) L2 spoken word, picture.

(C) L2 spoken word, L1 equivalent, picture, L2 printed word.

(D) L2 spoken word, L1 equivalent, picture.

A fifth combination was added for the secondary groups:

(E) L2 spoken word, L1 equivalent, L2 printed word.

The results of the imitation tests showed that in the primary group the most important factor in the child's ability to pronounce and imitate correctly was availability of the printed word. But where the L1 was used and the children had not grasped the meaning of the sentences they were learning to speak, their performance was adversely affected. In the secondary groups, where the acquisition and retention of meaning did not cause such great difficulty, the availability of the printed word was again a significant factor. It was noted that the performance of a secondary pupil or adult was just as badly affected as the primary child's when he had difficulty with the meaning of the sentence.

Proposed Experiment in the use of L1.

In view of the findings in the Dodson and Lim experiments, the writer proposes to investigate further the use of L1 in L2 teaching and learning. The problem merits further study not only to supply data for theory but also to solve certain practical problems. If the use of L1 does not necessarily impede the learning of L2 nor increase the amount of interlingual interference, then much time might be saved in the classroom by supplying the L1 equivalent of L2 structures instead of laborious explanations in L2. The difficulty of getting suitable visual aids to give meaning without fear of misinterpretation through ambiguous representation may also be obviated. The use of L1 does not, of course, exclude the use of visual aids, but the conscientious teacher might be spared feelings of guilt if they are sometimes not available and she resorts solely to L1 to clarify meaning. It is the problem of acquiring and retaining meaning which prompts the writer to study the use of L1 in L2 learning. Her experience with many children has shown that very often they can repeat sentences and read aloud quite well without an inkling of what they are saying. It may be that in attempting to minimise the use of L1 in the early stages of L2 learning we are inhibiting a "natural" tendency to translate and bring about a conflict between sub-conscious translation and overt injunction to think in the L2, with disastrous results to the acquisition of meaning. Only careful study will provide the answer.

The Dodson and Lim experiments mentioned above were carried out in Britain and America respectively. Also, the children concerned were

not taught in class; they were taken out one at a time and practised the L2 sentences individually. In other words, in order to obtain strict control over the variables that affect learning, the teaching took place under laboratory-like conditions.

The proposed experiment will be made in a Malaysian primary school where there are two groups of children. One group is taught in the English medium and the other in the Malay medium. They are taught in separate classrooms but mingle outside lesson periods. Each class is taught by one teacher in all lessons except the second language during which there is a cross-over of teachers from one medium to the other. Instead of being taught individually, as in the above experiments, the children involved in the present experiment will be taught as a class and follow the school syllabus.

The purpose of the experiment is to compare two methods of practising sentence patterns. In Method A, the meaning of the sentence is conveyed by appropriate pictures, gestures, objects, etc. In Method B, the meaning is conveyed by the L1 equivalent. The classes selected for the experiment are Standards 3 and 4 in the Malay medium stream. The second language is English. The steps in the introduction of new structures, practice and use of the sentences are standardized as far as possible for the two methods.

Each class is allocated five periods for the second language. Three periods are for oral work and pattern practice and two periods for reading, writing and other language activities. It is in the three periods for oral work that the two methods will be differentiated.

In order to obviate the teacher variable, one teacher will take the oral periods in both classes, leaving the other two periods for the other teacher. In the middle of the term the teachers will switch roles. The teachers have been asked to prepare tests on the work they intend to carry out for each half term. The children will be given these tests as pre-tests and at the end the same tests will be administered as post-tests. The gain scores will be computed and analysed to see if there are any significant differences.

At this time of writing the teachers have prepared the tests and will administer them soon. The children's achievement scores for L1 and Arithmetic in the previous term will be used as indicators of mental ability. This little experiment will be more in the nature of a pilot study to reveal snags in procedure and organization. The writer hopes to be able to report the results of this study at a later date and present evidence for or against the use of L1. What Allen (1948) says is still largely true: "It has yet to be demonstrated incontrovertibly that a Direct Method student makes this kind of mistake (due to interlingual interference) less frequently than students who freely use their own language in the early stage of learning a foreign language."

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